

## State issues fish advisory on American Falls Reservoir

By Michelle Dunlop  
Times-News writer

BOISE -- Moderation is the key.

On Friday, state officials advised the public on how much fish is safe to eat from American Falls Reservoir due to mercury concentrations there. Mercury has been linked to neurological disorders.

"If people follow the fish advisory, there really isn't a risk," said Tom Shannahan, spokesman for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, the agency responsible for issuing the advisory.

The advisory does not extend to the general public. However, pregnant women and children should limit their consumption of fish caught from the American Falls Reservoir.

The subject of mercury has generated a lot of interest lately. While mercury is a naturally occurring element, it is also emitted at mining operations and from coal-fired power plants -- like the proposed 600-megawatt facility near Jerome.

Two other southern Idaho water bodies already are under fish advisories: CJ Strike and Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir.

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are taking a year-long look at mercury in the Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir. High levels of mercury found at the reservoir piqued interest -- causing many to point to the northern Nevada gold mines as a potential source of contamination.

Testing over the summer at Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir showed mercury levels at 180 times what is considered healthy. However, DEQ officials announced that some of that data is inaccurate due to faulty test equipment. Mercury levels at the reservoir are still considered high and the monitoring effort will continue.

When mercury in the air enters the water, bacteria can convert it into methyl mercury, the form most hazardous to public health. Because mercury can travel in the air for hundreds of miles, determining the source of mercury in a particular water body can prove difficult. Like at Salmon Falls Creek, the source of mercury in American Falls Reservoir is unknown, said Chris Corwin, with the Fish Advisory Program of the Division of Health. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe recently issued its own fish advisory for the reservoir based on the Tribe's testing, Corwin said.

The state currently does not have a funded plan in place to monitor mercury concentrations at water bodies throughout Idaho. The effort generally involves the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, which collects the fish, as well as Health and Welfare and DEQ.

Sen. Chuck Coiner, R-Twin Falls, has expressed concern that many of Idaho's lakes and reservoirs remain untested for mercury concentrations. DEQ officials have begun the process of determining how much funding would be necessary to take on more testing.

Although residents should be cautious, overall, Corwin says fish are an excellent nutritional food source and vital to many people's diets.

"Fishing is one of the benefits of living in Idaho," he said. "We encourage people to eat fish, but advise them to follow these precautions to avoid any health problems for unborn and small children."

*Reporter Michelle Dunlop covers the Legislature and natural resources for The Times-News. She can be reached in Boise at 343-5553 or by e-mail at [mdunlop@magicvalley.com](mailto:mdunlop@magicvalley.com).*

### **Fish consumption advisory at American Falls Reservoir**

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare recommends the following in terms of eating fish caught at the American Falls Reservoir:

\* Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning to become pregnant should limit the fish they eat to no more than: 3 six-ounce meals per month of smallmouth bass and Utah sucker; 6 six-ounce meals per month of Utah chub; or 8 six-ounce meals per month of trout.

\* Children under the age of seven should not eat more than: four-ounce meal per month of smallmouth bass and Utah sucker; 2 four-ounce meals per month of Utah chub; or 4 four-ounce meals per month of trout.

\* For more information on the Web, go to:

<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/site/3329/default.aspx>